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## The multi-level nature of spatial planning and territorial governance

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## 4. The multi-level nature of spatial planning and territorial governance

**Wil Zonneveld and Dominic Stead**

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### INTRODUCTION

Local land use plans stipulating where and how development may take place can be found across all European countries (Nadin et al., 2018; Ryser and Franchini, 2015). In some countries, the scope of these plans can be narrow, while in others they can include a wide range of issues and material considerations (see Chapter 3), leading to a diversity in the types of local land use plans that are produced (see Chapter 5). Above the local level, at the sub-national and/or national levels, other sorts of plans or policy frameworks can also be found which specify whether and how territory can be developed. In large, urbanised regions, spatial plans are also often made at the metropolitan scale. This situation can be described in terms of multi-scalar or multi-level governance (MLG), where different levels of government have responsibilities for spatial planning, including the development of spatial plans (Marks and Hooghe, 2004). While MLG is often used in studies describing the relationships between the European Union, member states, regions and cities, it is also highly relevant for discussing the relationships between levels of government within a country. Moreover, governance powers are often distributed horizontally across governmental, quasi-governmental and non-governmental actors. As such, MLG is an important feature of spatial planning because of the wide range of interests that it can incorporate.

This chapter presents and characterises the distribution of powers and responsibilities for spatial planning across 32 countries in Europe drawing on the concept of MLG. We seek to investigate the organisation and reorganisation of competences across different administrative levels in response to the key challenges that spatial planning tries to address. Two specific issues are of particular interest: how national-level plan-making influences other administrative levels, and how planning in large metropolitan areas is organised. Evidence is mainly drawn from the ESPON (European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion) COMPASS (Comparative Analysis

of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe) projects which sought to analyse national systems of spatial planning and territorial governance and the changes that these underwent between 2000 and 2016. The projects and their methods are summarised in Chapter 2.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. First, the chapter offers a general overview of the various patterns of governance which can be found across Europe. Second, the chapter turns its attention to some of the major changes in powers and responsibilities between levels of government that have taken place since 2000. Third, it pays close attention to competences for spatial planning at the national level and how these may influence action at lower administrative levels. Fourth, the analysis focuses on the case of metropolitan regions as planning competences in these regions can be limited in scope and ad hoc in nature. Nevertheless, these regions represent a critical level for spatial planning. Many planning issues cross the boundaries of municipalities, while they also do not match the boundaries of sub-national levels of government. Finally, we round off with some conclusions.

## THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE FOR SPATIAL PLANNING AND TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

In order to discuss the different levels of decision-making relevant for spatial planning, it is first necessary to define what is meant by the term ‘levels of government’. In this chapter, the term primarily refers to the administrative levels which have decision-making powers in relation to spatial planning and whose competences are defined by law. It should be noted that this definition generally excludes regional bodies created by national governments for implementing regional-economic policies, such as European Union (EU) cohesion policy. This type of regional body (often regional development agencies) can be found in a number of countries across Europe. The fact that such bodies exist in parallel to the regular administrative system creates specific challenges in terms of connecting and integrating EU cohesion policy and domestic spatial planning. EU cohesion policy is often territorially highly relevant through direct spatial interventions, such as the development of new infrastructure. There can also be indirect effects, such as urbanisation in areas which were less accessible before the development of new infrastructure (see Chapter 8). The focus here is on the administrative levels that have decision-making powers in relation to spatial planning, and excludes non-elected supra-local authorities, such as groupings of local governments without an elected council and/or the legal requirement to develop spatial plans (except for metropolitan regions which may or may not form a formal planning level).

Following this definition, the number of levels of government with competences for spatial planning varies from two to four across the 32 countries

Table 4.1      Levels of government relevant for spatial planning in 2016

2 Levels	3 Levels	4 Levels
DK; IS; LI; LT; LU; MT; PT; SI; UK (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales)	AT; BE; BG; CH; CY; CZ; EE; EL; ES; FI; FR; HR; HU; LV; NL; NO; PL; RO; SE; SK; UK (England)	DE; IE; IT
No planning competences at national level: BE; ES; UK (the UK government has competence for spatial planning for England only).		

Note: See Abbreviations section for the countries included here.

Source: Nadin et al. (2018).

examined, as shown in Table 4.1. In the majority of countries (21 of 32), three levels of administration have competences for spatial planning. Some countries have only two levels of administration with competences to develop spatial plans (10 of 32), and a small number of countries have four. There are countries, though, that have administrative units with (often) limited planning power, but they do not have directly elected councils. A clear example is Portugal with two *áreas metropolitanas* or metropolitan areas (Lisbon and Porto) and 20 *comunidades intermunicipais* (intermunicipal communities). The lowest administrative level, the *freguesias* (parishes) does not have planning competences. In a small number of countries, there are no planning competences at the national level: Belgium, Spain<sup>1</sup> and the United Kingdom.

Drawing on the work of Magone (2011), Hague et al. (2019) and the European Committee of the Regions,<sup>2</sup> a number of distinct categories of governance arrangements can be distinguished in the 32 ESPON countries. First, there are federal states such as Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. There are unitary regionalised states, such as the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Italy, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, where important competences for planning (and other areas of policymaking) are devolved to regions. Then there are unitary decentralised states where competences for planning are devolved to lower levels of administration (below the level of what is generally understood as a region), as in the case of the Nordic countries (Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark; see Reichborn-Kjennerud and Vabo, 2017) as well as the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Hungary and Malta. Finally, there are unitary centralised states such as Ireland, Portugal, the three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Liechtenstein and Cyprus.<sup>3</sup>

It is recognised that there is not always complete agreement between the various sources used for this classification. For example, Magone classifies Hungary under unitary regionalised states (Magone, 2011, p. 308) due to the existence of seven non-elected regions which still exist under the name of so called *kiemelt régiók* or priority regions (Perger, 2018). Temesi (2017), on the

other hand, does not regard this level as a self-governed unit. A similar regional level (without elected bodies) also exists in Romania, while the country is characterised as a unitary centralised state (Magone, 2011, p. 309; see also Profiroiu et al., 2017). Other terms compared with the four categories above may be used as well. For instance, various terms are used to categorise Spain, ranging from ‘decentralised unitary state’ to ‘functional federalism’ (Ruano, 2017). The United Kingdom (UK) is sometimes called a devolved unitary state, with competences for spatial planning transferred to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales from the late 1990s.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the UK government has competences for spatial planning in England only. Since Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have varying degrees of competences for spatial planning, the UK’s administrative arrangements for spatial planning can be described as asymmetric. In other words, competences in certain policy domains (including spatial planning) are not distributed evenly across the state territory. This also counts for Spain, where the entire country is subdivided in regions, and Italy. In Italy only the relatively novel *città metropolitane* (metropolitan cities), which cover a small portion of the country only, acquired planning competences. In Spain there are differences between the exercise of powers albeit rather small.<sup>5</sup>

## SHIFTS IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES FOR SPATIAL PLANNING AND TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE 2000–2018

The situation discussed above may appear quite static in nature. However, on closer inspection, we can recognise that the administrative structures for spatial planning and territorial governance have experienced substantial changes over recent decades. This section examines some of the key trends in terms of powers and responsibilities for spatial planning. The rescaling of territorial governance refers to shifts in powers and responsibilities from one level of government to another and/or from one decision-making body to another (for further discussion of spatial rescaling in different contexts, see e.g., Lingua and Balz, 2020; Ruano and Profiroiu, 2017; Moisio et al., 2020). Such changes do not take place on a regular basis; they are quite exceptional as they require revisions of administrative laws or sometimes even constitutional arrangements. Across all 32 countries, there have been many reforms in the distribution of spatial planning competences between levels of government. These changes show a great variety in arrangements, but some common trends or patterns can be identified. A distinction is made between four groups of countries, which can be arranged according to four key trends: decentralisation, regionalisation, centralised decentralisation and centralisation.

Many countries have decentralised planning competences from national and sub-national levels to the local level and/or strengthening the autonomy of

local-level planning bodies. This follows a more general trend in strengthening the lower levels of self-government observed by authors such as Hooghe and Marks (2003) and Lidström (2007). One example is Germany, where municipalities in some states have acquired additional competences. Such changes are not regulated in federal law, but in state law. For this reason, this kind of decentralisation can be seen as asymmetric for the country as a whole. The Netherlands provides an example of symmetric decentralisation, where reforms seek to combine decentralisation with deregulation through a significant change in planning legislation (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Milieu, 2017; De Graaf and Tolsma, 2017). Municipalities are required to play a stronger role in spatial planning. The new law's date of introduction has been postponed several times as municipalities were not sufficiently prepared to take over their new competences and duties, illustrating that decentralisation goes hand in hand with issues of organisational capacity (the law came into effect on January 1, 2024). Another example is Croatia, where the role of municipalities has been strengthened, which includes spatial planning (Jurlina Alibegović and Slijepčević, 2012; Scharmann and Cibilić, 2020). Prior to 2007, only the national administration had the right to issue building permits. After a legal change in 2007, large towns and cities acquired this competence, although in an asymmetric way whereby building permits can only be issued at the local level in some areas, a competence which was later also acquired by counties.

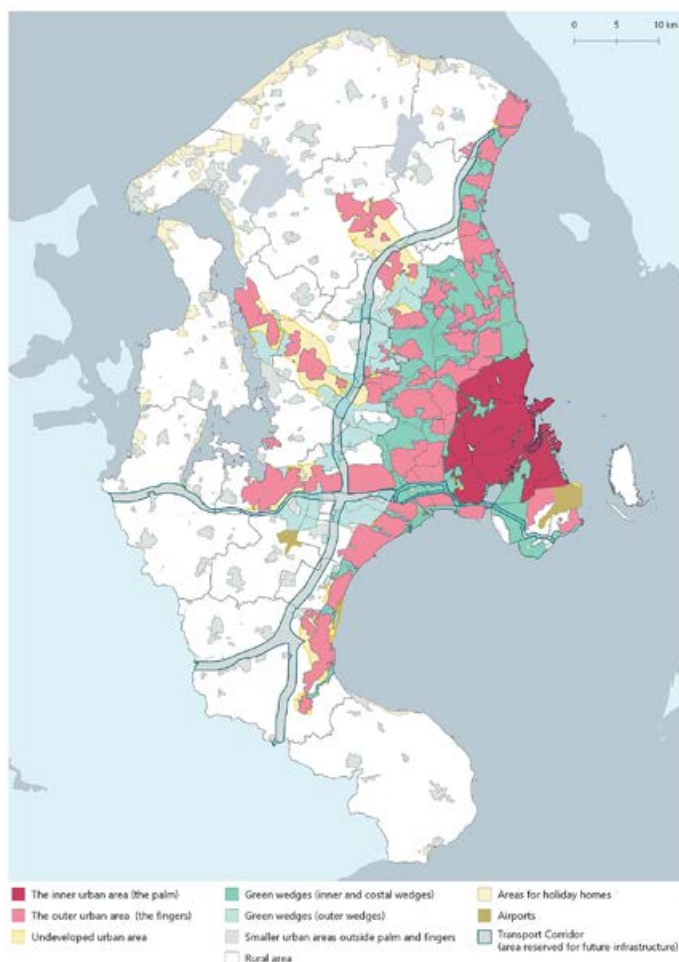
A second group of countries can be identified where planning at the sub-national level has been strengthened. This is termed regionalisation. Examples include the United Kingdom (because of devolution; see Burnham, 2017), Slovakia (Marasova and Horehajova, 2017), Finland and France. Strictly speaking, France can be regarded as a hybrid between regionalisation and decentralisation, since two levels (regions and municipalities) have become core actors in spatial planning and have gained planning competences after legal changes in 2010, 2014 and 2015. At the regional level, the country's 22 regions have been reduced to 13 as a result of mergers, while their spatial planning competences were extended (Desjardins and Geppert, 2020). Greece may be included in this group as well (Kyvelou and Marava, 2017) although the categorisation of Greece is difficult because the division of competences has followed a changeable pattern over time. Planning legislation enacted in the late 1990s and the early 2000s attempted to delegate planning powers to regional and local levels of government. This redistribution of planning powers met with serious legal objections from the Council of State, the country's supreme administrative court. The court recognised urban and regional planning as a state function that, under the Constitution, pertains only to central government. Hence, planning powers were transferred back to the central state after 2005. Planning legislation in 2016 sought a partial

decentralisation of planning powers again. Whether this will hold remains to be seen (Getimis and Giannakourou, 2014). This example shows that changing multi-level arrangements can take a long time to settle or may be even constantly disputed or revised.

Governance rescaling in a small group of countries has taken the form of ‘centralised decentralisation’. An example is Denmark (Chatzopoulou and Poulsen, 2017). The changes there cannot be defined as either decentralisation or centralisation of (planning) competences. After long discussions, a fundamental reform proposal was passed by the Danish Parliament (Folketing) in early 2005 and became operational in January 2007. The number of municipalities was greatly reduced (from 275 to 98) and all counties were abolished (there were previously 14). Most of the functions of the counties (including competences for spatial planning) were transferred to enlarged municipalities while certain competences were transferred to the national level. This is why some observers have referred to the Danish administrative reform as an example of centralised decentralisation (Andersen, 2008; see also Galland, 2020). For example, the Greater Copenhagen Authority was previously responsible for metropolitan planning including the famous Finger Plan (Olesen and Richardson, 2012; Galland, 2020), but it was abolished as part of the 2007 reform. Responsibility for planning in the Copenhagen metropolitan region was transferred to the national level. The Finger Plan is now part of a national planning directive according to the Danish Planning Act (Danish Ministry of the Environment, 2015; see Figure 4.1). Another example of centralised decentralisation is Lithuania, where the use of the national Comprehensive Plan of the State Territory at local level is mandatory. While this may be regarded as a kind of central intervention in local planning, it remains to be seen how effectively this works in practice. Another reason why Lithuania falls into this category is that all counties were abolished in 2010 and their functions were redistributed to municipalities as well as state institutions.

There are few examples of straightforward centralisation trends. In addition to Luxembourg (and possibly Greece, see above) an example is Wallonia. Belgium does not have spatial planning competences at the national level (see next section). While the autonomy of local authorities increased in the neighbouring Belgian region of Flanders during the last two decades (that is, decentralisation), governance arrangements in Wallonia moved in a different direction. The new 2017 regional planning code strips municipal authorities of their regulatory planning competences, meaning that these authorities are now only able to produce indicative plans. Zoning regulation has become an exclusive competence of the Walloon region.<sup>6</sup> The rationale is largely economic: a higher level of flexibility in the planning system in relation to large and complex projects which is expected to stimulate the economy. This is related to the severe challenges which Wallonia is facing as a former highly indus-





Source: Danish Business Authority (2019).

Figure 4.1 The Finger Plan for the Copenhagen region

trialised area, the first area on the continent where the Industrial Revolution took off. The 2017 legal change means that the Walloon administration can bypass municipalities in setting priorities and land use change. How land use regulation may influence economic investments is apparently regarded as a higher-level interest.

In a small number of countries in Europe, no significant changes in powers and responsibilities for spatial planning took place between 2000 and 2018.

Examples include Sweden, Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein and Iceland. Most changes are less extensive and more gradual, such as reductions in the number of municipalities, which has occurred in many countries across Europe (Swianiewicz et al., 2017). A major change of administrative structures, like the one in Denmark, can be seen as an example of administrative rescaling, which is less common, while a creeping process of amalgamation of municipalities is more usual. However, it is important to emphasise that spatial planning competences are still generally shared at various levels in most countries, despite many shifts in powers and responsibilities (see also Nadin et al., 2018, pp. 44–45). In other words, spatial planning is an activity which involves different levels of government, and which is subject to multi-level governance (see Hooghe and Marks, 2003). Where devolution takes place, this is often not a straightforward process: it may go hand in hand with centralisation (Denmark) or lead to new competences at the lowest administrative level, but which may be rather difficult to handle in terms of administrative capacity (the Netherlands).

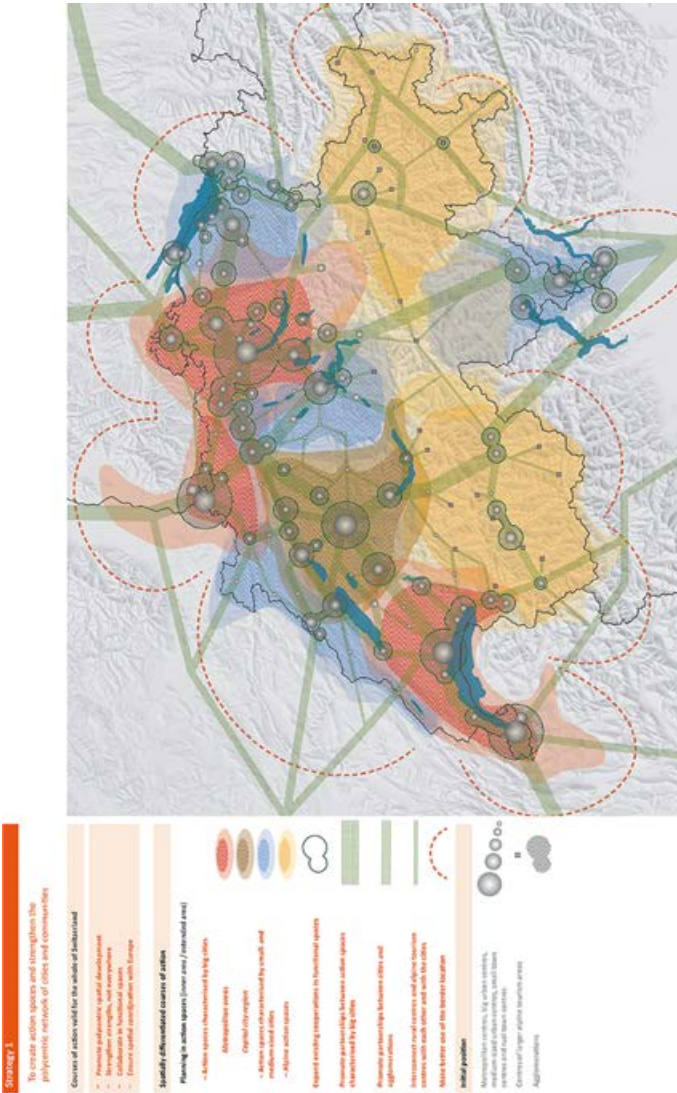
## THE DIFFERENT FACES OF NATIONAL PLAN-MAKING

Planning powers and competences can change over time, sometimes after long periods of political turmoil (for example, Spain) or even a break-up of a nation (for example, the former Republic of Yugoslavia). In Belgium, a country which has become a federal state in a stepwise manner over the course of decades (see Husson et al., 2017), the absence of national spatial planning competences has created a set of specific planning problems, as development in the Brussels Capital Region (an administrative federal region) has a huge influence on the neighbouring federal regions of Flanders and Wallonia.<sup>7</sup> For instance, the Brussels housing market encompasses large parts of these two regions, which is clearly visible if one looks at commuting patterns, land prices and the resulting tensions between language communities. From around the 1990s up to the early 2000s, the Benelux spatial vision served as a proxy of a national spatial strategy (De Vries and Van den Broeck, 1997; D'hondt and Mastop, 1997). However, this vision was never updated, since from around the mid-2000s there seemed to be no longer a shared interest in an overarching vision amongst the Benelux partners (the Netherlands, Luxembourg and the three Belgium regions). Despite this governance complexity, some sectoral plans have been developed in territories extending beyond the federal regions. For example, a public transport strategy was developed to facilitate the development of the Brussels Regional Express Network. In this case, the federal government, the three federal regions and four public transport operators were eventually involved in developing the plan (Evers and De Vries, 2013), illus-

trating that it is easier to agree on a project which crosses local and regional administrative boundaries than a national spatial planning strategy.

Other federal states have developed different approaches for spatial planning at the national level. The 2012 general national spatial framework of Switzerland, known as Territorial Concept Switzerland (Raumkonzept Schweiz/Projet de Territoire Suisse/Progetto territoriale Svizzera), was the very first of its kind in the country. The document is described as a guidance framework in the 'official' English title in order to help to support decision-making. It is neither prescriptive nor legally binding.<sup>8</sup> The making of this document involved a range of actors from different levels of decision-making: the federal level (*Bund*), the cantons (the sub-national administrative layer in Switzerland), the municipalities and the Union of Swiss Cities (Schweizerischer Städteverband). The 2012 national spatial framework provides an overview of policy goals in a limited number of policy sectors, translates these goals into general strategies, and applies them in a number of territories across the country (Schweizerischer Bundesrat et al., 2012). This sort of multi-level policy-making is supported by a number of broad, general maps (see Figure 4.2 as an example) which seek to represent the overall spatial structure of the country which are supposed to serve as a kind of guidance to identify policy priorities and to support spatial planning in general.

The Swiss approach has similarities with the two other federal states in Europe: Germany and Austria. In Germany, Switzerland and Austria, the conference of ministers responsible for spatial planning at the federal level and state level (and municipalities in Austria) agree on jointly produced spatial strategies. These multi-level conferences of ministers produce and agree on strategic guidance documents which express political commitment but are not formally binding in the sense of statutory duties for implementation at the state level and below. The German ministerial conference adopts so-called guiding principles (*Leitbilder*), which, like the Austrian document, also includes an action framework or *Handlungsrahmen* (ÖROK, 2011; MKRO, 2016). Compared with the Austrian document, the German document is articulated more strongly in a cartographical sense since it contains a vision of the spatial structure of the territory (Blotevogel et al., 2014; Dühr, 2005, 2007). However, the development of various parts of the vision was fraught with political difficulties, such as the identification of urban regions (Diller, 2016). One of the problems of agreeing on visions with cartographic representations is that they may result in the inclusion or exclusion of certain territories from governmental spending programmes. Conflicts may also arise from cartographic representations that identify, frame or cluster territories in a certain way which may lead to some sort of territorial prejudices (Faludi, 1996; Jensen and Richardson, 2004).



Note: Apart from cities and other urban centres and agglomerations (circular symbols) nearly all other symbols are related to various sorts of action and cooperation areas.  
Source: Schweizerischer Bundesrat et al. (2012); translation from German by the authors.

Figure 4.2 Creating action spaces and strengthening the polycentric network of cities and municipalities

In many countries, national documents put a strong emphasis on providing information and analysis through figures, tables and maps, and far less on setting strategic objectives for the future development of the nation. Examples include the Spatial Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia,<sup>9</sup> the Danish National Planning Report (see Galland, 2020), the Hungarian National Development and Territorial Development Concept,<sup>10</sup> the Polish National Spatial Development Concept 2030<sup>11</sup> and the National Spatial Plan Estonia 2030+.<sup>12</sup>

In some countries there are separate and parallel forms of national planning. In the Czech Republic, for example, the Ministry of Regional Development is responsible for two types of plans. The National Spatial Development Policy sets out general guidelines for planning and outlines key spatial relations (OECD, 2018). Meanwhile, the Regional Development Strategy sets out national objectives for regional development, and mainly deals with EU cohesion policy. Comparable parallel structures can also be found in Bulgaria, where there is the National Concept of Spatial Development 2013–2025 and the National Strategy for Regional Development 2012–2022 (with slightly different planning horizons). Romania has a similar parallel structure of planning. The National Spatial Development Plan seeks to integrate national sectoral policies (that is, horizontal coordination), while the Territorial Development Strategy of Romania is a programming document with a time horizon of 20 years which seeks to coordinate relevant public policies at national, regional and local level (that is, horizontal and vertical coordination).

The discussion above clearly suggests that the picture presented in Table 4.1 masks a complex variety of arrangements. In general, some sort of national planning can often be found in unitary countries where national government has a dominant role for legislation on planning. Most national planning documents (where they exist) are generally non-binding for other administrative levels, but merely set out overall objectives and planning approaches in combination with key information about the national territory. In federal states, some attempts have been made to develop joint arrangements between national and sub-national governments as well as other stakeholders (as in the cases of Austria and Switzerland). In strongly regionalised states there is no national planning (as in the cases of the United Kingdom, Belgium and Spain).

Although national governments often provide the legal conditions for land use planning, they rarely develop land use plans themselves. However, there are various exceptions. In a small number of countries, national governments issue directives for land use at other levels of administration. One example is Hungary, although the country also has a non-statutory strategic document at the national level (as mentioned above). Other countries which use national guidelines for land use are Finland and Ireland. Some countries have legal provisions where national governments can develop a (local or regional) land use

plan in the case of overriding national interests. Examples include Norway and the Netherlands. In Cyprus, local land use plans need approval from central government. Clearly, there is a diversity of arrangements between levels of government in relation to land use, ranging from non-intervention to direct involvement.

## PLANNING IN METROPOLITAN REGIONS

Spatial planning seeks to deal with a range of issues at different scales. Traditionally, there has been great emphasis on the regional scale to focus on the interrelations between urbanisation and suburbanisation on the one hand, and transport and infrastructure on the other (OECD, 2015). More recently, there is a tendency in research as well as practice to address a wider set of issues related to functional integration at the regional level. Examples include energy transition, water management, waste and circularity: issues influenced by the increasing societal and political importance given to sustainability and climate change. How statutory administrative structures for spatial planning match the variety of regional scales which may be connected to functional integration has become a pressing issue. In fact, metropolitan bodies assuming responsibilities for public policy in metropolitan regions are common across many European countries. Very few countries have no metropolitan body at all according to the 2013 OECD Metropolitan Survey: more than two-thirds of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) metropolitan areas currently have some kind of body or agency responsible for metropolitan governance (Ahrend et al., 2014).<sup>13</sup> Considerable diversity exists in their legal status, whether they have a directly elected council or not, as well as their competences, power, budget and staff, and consequently in their impact on policy design and implementation.<sup>14</sup> According to Tatham et al. (2021), the governance of regions is more contested and more variable across time and space than most other spatial scales. Recent decades have witnessed an unprecedented growth in new arrangements for regional governance across the world, with EU countries often at the forefront. Since the 1960s, new tiers of sub-national government have been introduced in 25 European countries (Tatham et al., 2021).

Three main categories of governance arrangements for metropolitan regions can be identified: (1) specific legally defined responsibilities for a limited number of city regions; (2) metropolitan regions based on joint municipal agreements; and (3) metropolitan regions shaped as soft territorial cooperation areas.

The first category concerns specific responsibilities for a limited number of city regions. These arrangements are prescribed by national governments which are ultimately responsible for the formal administrative system. In

countries such as Croatia, Hungary and Romania specific arrangements are only created in the capital region, whereas in Italy 14 metropolitan cities (*citt  metropolitana*) have been formed by national government. This arrangement essentially represents a simplification of the administrative system by removing one level of administration (the province) in the selected city regions, that are formed by a central city plus (a large number of) surrounding municipalities. The Italian solution to the ‘metropolitan issue’ has been subject to criticism on several counts, including the delineation of administrative boundaries, and the types of competences allocated to different levels of government (Crivello and Staricco, 2017; Fedeli, 2017). Similar criticisms have been levelled at the Greater Copenhagen Authority, whose regional planning competences were abolished and taken over by the national government in 2007 (see above).

The Greater London Authority, created in 2000, is an example of an additional tier of government with an elected mayor, elected political members and specific competences for spatial planning among other policy sectors. The mayor adopts a spatial development strategy and lower-level plans in general conformity with this strategy. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, the national government abolished a quasi-fourth level of government in eight urban regions in 2014 which were created only six years earlier. Over the course of several decades, many different options have been discussed in this country to solve what has been termed the mismatch between administrative units and spatial policy issues. Options include the redesign of the provincial administrative structure, a new fourth administrative layer (between municipalities and provinces), and an asymmetric option which was introduced in 2008. What currently still exists from this change are two public transport authorities: one in the Amsterdam region, and one in the region covering The Hague and Rotterdam. In parallel, there are also voluntary, informal arrangements in these two areas, known as metropolitan regions (see Spaans et al., 2021). All in all, the Netherlands form an example of a country where discussions about governance rescaling seem to be a never-ending story.

The second category of governance arrangements concerns joint municipal agreements. These are mostly regions established by voluntary cooperation of municipalities to deal with municipal tasks and services which are difficult to provide by individual municipalities. They are based on legal arrangements between municipalities in such a way that the provision of services can be contracted out. They can be regarded as a kind of spatially extended form of municipal government, although the new entities have no elected body. These could be termed service regions, and can be found in Finland, the Netherlands and France. Finland has 19 such regions, and the Netherlands has hundreds, often partially overlapping with each other (there is no central register).<sup>15</sup> In France, the pattern is more complex because there are four categories of bodies, some of which deal with plan-making. It is not clear to what extent

these formal regions can be regarded as planning regions, as their focus is on the delivery of different kinds of services. Some planning systems such as the Norwegian, Swedish, German and Dutch system allow inter-municipal statutory plans.

Research from the ESPON COMPASS and ESPON ACTAREA (Thinking and Planning in Areas of Territorial Cooperation) projects (see also Nadin et al., 2018; Gløersen et al., 2017), as well as the wider literature (e.g. Haughton et al., 2010; Allmendinger et al., 2015), suggests that there are large numbers of soft territorial cooperation areas, representing a third category of governance arrangements. These arrangements bring together different actors, not necessarily from public administrations only, who are prepared to voluntarily elaborate and implement joint plans and/or strategies to address common territorial challenges (Simeonova et al., 2018). One of the simplest forms of territorial cooperation areas seeks to promote horizontal cooperation where municipalities cooperate in spatial strategy-making. In this case boundaries are soft in the sense of being flexible in composition (although there might be strong political pressure to participate or abstain), and voluntary in terms of procedures. Horizontal cooperation may also extend to other sectoral policy fields (for example, transport, environment or industrial policies; see Chapter 6). Sometimes soft territorial cooperation can include participants from the private sector or non-governmental organisations. Research from the COMPASS project suggests that these arrangements are widespread. There is also great variety between them. Soft arrangements for territorial cooperation can be seen as a response to some of the challenges or limitations of statutory planning, such as inter-sectoral coordination, multi-actor involvement, and functional integration at multiple spatial scales.

Looking at the large variety of governance relationships within metropolitan regions it is clear that the policies of upper-level governments, regional or national, have a major impact on the adoption of inter-municipal or metropolitan planning frameworks (OECD, 2015). Whether metropolitan regions have regulatory powers is highly dependent on whether national or federal state governments are able and willing to give such powers. Regulatory powers need to be defined in law, and agencies need to be created to enact these powers. More comparative research is needed here, but it seems apparent that formal arrangements are not necessarily more effective compared with informal arrangements. A metropolitan region installed by national government may be ridden with political conflicts, while an informal region may become effective over the course of years through the creation of a culture of trust and cooperation.



## CONCLUSIONS

Examining the multi-level nature of spatial planning in 32 countries in Europe presents a diverse picture. This diversity is illustrated in Table 4.1, which focuses on statutory levels of administration based on laws and constitutions. While the administrative arrangements in some countries are very old, others are more recent. Some are the product of substantial recent government reforms, while others have already existed for long periods of time (for example, provinces in Belgium and the Netherlands; federal states in Germany and Austria). In some countries, it is very difficult to change administrative boundaries (for example, municipalities in France, some of which have no inhabitants) while the delineation of municipal boundaries in other countries seems to be easier to adjust by central government (in Denmark for instance). In the Netherlands, municipal boundaries are subject to a slow but ongoing process of review and amalgamation (Broekema et al., 2016). Administrative structures in most countries are not set in stone. A distinction between four patterns of change can be made: decentralisation, regionalisation, centralised decentralisation and centralisation. A possible fifth pattern is that there is no profound change at all.

The role of national government in spatial planning is highly diverse. Some countries such as the Netherlands have a long tradition combined with a multi-level approach. In other countries there is no national involvement in planning (for example, Belgium, Spain, United Kingdom), while in the three quintessential federal countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) truly multi-level frameworks have been developed where the authoritative guidance seems to be dependent on content as well as the characteristic of the gestation process, which in all cases is highly discursive. There also seems to be an increasing use of national documents with the prime function of collecting and presenting information about territorial development trends and main characteristic of the structure of the national territory, which lower levels of administration may use (or neglect) to their benefit.

Dealing with the regional 'void' in spatial planning is a pressing issue (Hajer, 2003). The regional level (i.e. a sub-national level) is particularly fluid in terms of governance arrangements. Statutory regions can be subject to change or even abolition, sometimes after only a handful of years. This is often the case when it concerns a small number of regions in one country (for example, arrangements for the capital city regions in Denmark and the UK) which is a reflection of their unitary form and the power of central government. The future of the 14 metropolitan cities in Italy is uncertain at the time of writing as legal arrangements have yet to be finalised. Soft governance arrangements may be the only option if other administrative arrangements

cannot be changed. Whether the resulting soft regions can pool their capacities and resources in an accountable way is a key challenge for spatial planning in these contexts.

While the chapter has only been able to provide a glimpse of how territorial governance arrangements affect policies and policy frameworks, it has amply illustrated how spatial planning is a clear case of multi-scalar or multi-level governance. The chapter has highlighted several key trends in governance arrangements across 32 countries in Europe. Each of these trends has crucial implications not only for the practice of spatial planning but also for the outcomes of such practice.

## NOTES

1. In the COMPASS project Spain is classified as a country which does not have any sort of spatial planning at the national level due to the fact that planning competences are concentrated at the level of the 17 *comunidades autónomas* (autonomous communities). There is, however, a national *Ley de Suelo* (Land Law) which regulates the rights and obligations of landowners; there are no direct implications in terms of spatial development though. This nevertheless means that the most 'pure' example of a country which does not have any sort of planning at the national level is Belgium.
2. <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/All-countries.aspx> (accessed 10 March 2021).
3. The portal of the Committee of the Regions (see previous note) classifies Cyprus and Malta as unitary states *tout court*.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/devolution-of-powers-to-scotland-wales-and-northern-ireland> (accessed 11 May 2021).
5. <https://www.aalep.eu/spanish-autonomous-communities-and-competences> (accessed 11 May 2021).
6. Note that the meaning of *région* in Wallonia, the French-speaking part of Belgium, is very different to *région* used in France.
7. As well as the three federal regions in Belgium (each with their own parliament), there are also three language communities (French, Dutch and German), which have their own parliament. Flanders has an integrated parliament for the region as well as the Dutch community. Including the national level, Belgium has six administrations and parliaments. See: [https://www.belgium.be/en/about\\_belgium/government/federale\\_staat](https://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/government/federale_staat) (accessed 29 March 2021).
8. The reader is invited to explore these fundamental concepts as the relevant website is consistently trilingual: <https://www.are.admin.ch/are/de/home/raumentwicklung-und-raumplanung/strategie-und-planung/raumkonzept-schweiz.html> (accessed 29 March 2021).
9. Available at: [https://mpgi.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Zavod/Publikacije/Spaltial\\_Development.Strategy.pdf](https://mpgi.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Zavod/Publikacije/Spaltial_Development.Strategy.pdf) (accessed 29 March 2021).
10. Available at: [https://ngmszakmaiteruletek.kormany.hu/download/4/7f/d0000/OFTK\\_vegleges\\_EN.pdf](https://ngmszakmaiteruletek.kormany.hu/download/4/7f/d0000/OFTK_vegleges_EN.pdf) (accessed 29 March 2021).
11. Available at: <https://www.kooperation-ohne-grenzen.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/NSDC-2030.pdf> (accessed 29 March 2021).

12. Synopsis available at: [https://eesti2030.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/estonia-2030\\_synopsis\\_web.pdf](https://eesti2030.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/estonia-2030_synopsis_web.pdf) (accessed 29 March 2021).
13. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has 38 member countries. ESPON countries which are not a member of the OECD are: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Malta and Romania (<https://www.oecd.org/about/members-and-partners/>; accessed 29 March 2021).
14. The ESPON COMPASS project only paid limited attention to planning in metropolitan regions, since its main focus was on the system of spatial planning at national level. This section draws on OECD research and other ESPON projects.
15. Alongside these arrangements there are 79 different categories of regions either developed or instigated by Dutch government or national law. See: <https://www.regioatlas.nl/regioindelingen> (accessed 29 March 2021).

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